

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEGUCI 04290 081844Z

63

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCS-01 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 HEW-01

INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 RSC-01 SCA-01 USIA-04

SWF-01 DRC-01 /038 W

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R 081609Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8261

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 4290

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SWEL, HO

SUBJECT: VIEWS OF ROBERTO GALVEZ BARNES, EX-AMBASSADOR  
TO U.S. (PRESENTLY COORDINATOR FOR EXTERNAL  
AID) ON U.S. DISASTER ASSISTANCE.

1. ON OCTOBER 6, ROBERTO GALVEZ BARNES, IN A TELEPHONE  
CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER, MADE THE FOLLOWING  
POINTS:

A. THERE IS A CONTINUING CRITICAL NEED FOR HELICOPTERS  
IN THE DISASTER AREAS, ACCENTUATED BY THE WEEKEND RAINS AND  
FLOODING IN THE SULA VALLEY. HE HAD JUST CALLED THE DIRECTOR  
OF ARA/CEN TO EXPRESS THIS VIEW PROMPTED BY HIS UNDERSTANDING  
THAT WE WERE ORDERING RETURN OF THE HELICOPTERS TO PANAMA.  
(HE WAS INFORMED BY MR. LAZAR AND BY THE EMBASSY OFFICER  
THAT THE PHASE OUT OF OUR AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN SUSPENDED  
BECAUSE OF THE RECENT RAINS, THE MATTER IS UNDER FURTHER  
STUDY AND THAT ANY DECISION REACHED WILL BE WORKED OUT  
WITH THE GOH).

B. GALVES BARNES REITERATED THE WIDELY EXPRESSED  
LOCAL COMPLAINT THAT DURING THE 1954 FLOODS HONDURAS HAD  
AT ITS DISPOSAL 20 HELICOPTERS ON AN U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER  
PLUS 8 OTHER. HE SAID IT WAS A MISTAKE TO CONSIDER THE  
PRESENT DISASTER AS SIMPLY THE AFTERMATH OF A HURRICANE.

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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 04290 081844Z

HE SAID THE AREA HAS A HISTORY OF A 18-20 YEAR CYCLE OF

FLOODS, THAT FIFI WAS ONLY THE START AND THERE WILL BE MORE RAINING AND FLOODING IN THE DISASTER AREAS ON THE NORTH COAST BEFORE DECEMBER. HE SAID THE RAINS MAY LET UP FOR SEVERAL DAYS BUT A COLD FRONT IS EXPECTED TO BRING HEAVY RAINS ON OCTOBER 10 AND THAT THERE WOULD BE "HIGH SEAS" ON THE 15TH OF OCTOBER.

C. HE ASSERTED THAT THE U.S. WILL BE HEAVILY CRITICIZED IF WE WITHDRAW THE HELICOPTERS AT THIS CRITICAL TIME SINCE THE NEW RAINS HAVE BROUGHT MORE FLOODING, CUT COMMUNICATIONS AND AGAIN KNOCKED OUT BRIDGES AND ROADS, ISOLATING GROUPS OF PEOPLE IN NUMEROUS AREAS.

D. HE RECOGNIZED THE U.S. HAS NO OBLIGATION TO HELP BUT SINCE WE HAVE BROUGHT IN SO MUCH HELP HONDURAS HAS NOT TURNED TO OTHERS. HE WARNED HOWEVER, THAT IF THE U.S. SHOULD DECIDE TO WITHDRAW ITS HELICOPTERS THE GOH WILL HAVE TO LOOK ELSEWHERE INCLUDING TO SOME COUNTRIES WHICH BOTH THEY AND WE WOULD PREFER NOT TO SEE OPERATING IN HONDURAS.

E. FRUSTRATIONS OF HIS PRESENT JOB AS COORDINATOR FOR EXTERNAL AID FOR COPEN ARE SO GREAT THAT HE IS CONSIDERING GIVING UP HIS JOB AND GOING TO SAN PEDRO SULA TO HELP OUT WHERE HE COULD THERE.

2. THE AMBASSADOR LATER CALLED GALVEZ ON THE AMBASSADOR'S RETURN FROM HIS RECONNAISSANCE OF THE NORTH COAST. GALVEZ MADE MANY OF THE SAME POINTS IN THAT CONVERSATION. HE ADMITTED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT HIS EARLIER CALL AND HIS CALL FOR MORE HELICOPTERS WAS BASED NOT ON DIRECT, PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENT CONDITIONS ON THE NORHT COAST BUT ON REPORTS OF TWO HAM RADIO OPERATORS IN THE AREA. LUCKILY, THE AMBASSADOR WAS ABLE TO GIVE HIM A DIRECT REPORT ON HIS OWN PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS MADE THAT SAME DAY ON THE NORTH COAST. HE WAS ABLE AUTHORITATIVELY TO REFUTE THE ALARMIST REPORTS WHICH HAD REACHED GALVEZ. GALVEZ ADMITTED, WHEN THE AMBASSADOR INQUIRED WHETHER GALVEZ' REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL HELICOPTERS HAD BEEN APPROVED BY COPEN (I.E., MAKING IT AN OFFICIAL GOH REQUEST) THAT HE HAD NOT DISCUSSED THIS WITH ANYONE; THAT HE DOES NOT EVEN SIT IN ON THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEGUCI 04290 081844Z

MEETINGS OF COPEN DESPITE HIS PRESENT POSITION. HE ALSO ADMITTED THAT LAST WEEK'S VISIT TO THE AMBASSADOR BY A COMMISSION OF WOMEN DEMANDING MORE HELICOPTERS (HEADED BY MRS. GALVEZ) HAD TAKEN PLACE WITH HIS KNOWLEDGE.

3. GALVEZ BARNES CALLS ARE INDICATIVE OF THE EMBASSY'S CONTINUING PROBLEM WITH THE "HELICOPTER SYNDROME" HERE IN HONDURAS. WHILE HE WAS PROBABLY REACTING IRRATIONALLY

OUT OF FRUSTRATION AND IN RESPONSE TO LOCAL PRESSURES, THIS KIND OF EMOTIONAL, UNCOORDINATED AND ILL-THOUGHT OUT REQUEST FOR HELICOPTER ASSISTANCE CONTINUES TO PLAGUE OUR ASSISTANCE EFFORTS HERE. THE HELICOPTER HAS BECOME A DRAMATIC SYMBOL OF EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND THE FACT THAT IT IS AN INEFFICIENT AND UNECONOMICAL INSTRUMENT FOR MASS DELIVERY OF AID (AFTER THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS IS PAST) IS LITTLE UNDERSTOOD HERE. THE BASIC NEED NOW IS NOT FOR LARGE NUMBERS OF ADDITIONAL HELICOPTERS, BUT FOR A SPEEDY MEANS FOR RESTORING LAND COMMUNICATION BY REOPENING ROADS AND REBUILDING BRIDGES ON A LEAST A TEMPORARY BASIS. YET LAST WEEKEND'S RAINS FOUND THE AMBASSADOR BACK ON THE NORTH COAST OBSERVING THAT VIRTUALLY NO PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE. EMBOFFS WILL VISIT, AT THE AMBASSADOR'S REQUEST, WITH MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS TO ASCERTAIN SPECIFIC PLANS AND TIMETABLES IN THE MILL FOR INFRASTRUCTURE REHABILITATION; ALSO TO SEE IF THEY HAVE ANY REQUESTS TO MAKE OF US FOR ASSISTANCE IN HELPING WITH HONDURAN RECONSTRUCTION INITIATIVES. SANCHEZ

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